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AWARDEE REPORT FORM

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| NAME | | Hazel Allardyce | | |
| TWITTER HANDLE\* *optional* | | @hazelAllardyce\_ | | |
| UNIVERSITY | | University of Aberdeen | | |
| NAME OF AWARD | | Symington Bequest Award | | |
| PURPOSE OF AWARD *conference/event attended/organised (full name) with city and dates.* | | | | |
| For attendance at the 4th International SMA Europe Congress, 13th-16th March 2024 to give an oral presentation titled ‘Microvascular dysregulation: the missing link in SMA pathogenesis?’ | | | | |
| REPORT: What were your anticipated benefits?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| There are many benefits of attending the 4th International SMA Europe Congress, as the only SMA focussed conference that is held in Europe.  Following acceptance into the pre-conference ECR meets the SMA community event, I hoped to form a relationship with a group of patients and patient advocates which would allow me to further understand how their lives are impacted by this disease and what they believe is required to further the field of SMA research and improve their quality of life. I also hoped to build a network of people within the SMA community who I can work with in the future to ensure that I am doing my best as a researcher to contribute to advancements in this field.  The main reason for attending this conference was to present my research on microvascular involvement in the pathogenesis of SMA, allowing me to raise awareness of the potential impact on microvascular damage observed in SMA patient spinal cord to academics, clinicians and the SMA community.  Finally, I attended this conference to update my knowledge on current advances and new findings in the field of SMA, as well as networking with new researchers, reconnecting with those I already know, and building collaboration for future research projects. | | | | |
| COMMENTS: Describe your experience at the conference / lab visit / course / seminar/ event.  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| My experience at SMA Europe was fantastic and collaborations made will be an important aspect of my future career progression.  Firstly, the pre-conference ECR meets the SMA community event was highly beneficial. At a table of ECRs, patients and patient advocates, we discussed what its like to live with SMA or have a family member with the condition. We also discussed differences in healthcare systems around the world which directly impacts treatment success and quality of life for many patients. This was a wonderful experience which allowed me to connect with those that my research will directly affect in years to come. I also had the opportunity to present my research to them in a 3-minute-thesis style which allowed patients to understand what research was currently ongoing in the field. In addition, by meeting with patients I was able to gather some anecdotal evidence of vascular issues that they have which will be useful for my future research.  I attended all symposiums and learned about research ongoing in many areas, including design of innovative assistive technology, gene therapy advances and developmental aspects of disease. I also attended workshops on creating a research agenda for SMA which brought together clinicians, researchers, patients and their families to raise awareness of the aspects that each group think are the most important for future research direction.  I gave my oral presentation on the second day of the conference which was very well received. Following this I spoke with many people about my data. These individuals included pharmaceutical company representatives, clinicians, academic researchers and patients who were all interested in my findings. Conversations with clinicians and researchers will now progress as collaborative projects. | | | | |
| REPORT: In relation to skills, what were the most important things you gained? *(does not apply to equipment grant.* For public engagement/outreach awards what did your audience gain and how did you evaluate success?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| One of the most importance things that I gained during this conference was forming a network with patients and patient advocates that I can continue to work alongside in years to come. I improved my skills in communicating science in a non-scientific manner, and in connecting with individuals who are directly affected by the disease that I have been researching for the past 6 years. This will also provide a basis for inclusion of public patient involvement (PPI) in my future research projects, which I know is extremely important in current funding applications.  I also gained confidence in the quality of my scientific research due to the incredible feedback I was given by many attendees following my oral presentation. In addition, I gained confidence in my presenting skills to a large audience of 1000 attendees, the largest audience I have ever presented to.  Finally, I have gained a fantastic number of collaborations with research institutes in Sheffield, London and Keele, as well as further afield in Hannover, Germany and Trento, Italy. These collaborations will allow me to grow my personal research network so that my future projects may involve application of a host of techniques and expertise, allowing me to expand my research portfolio which will be important in future career progression. | | | | |
| REPORT: How do you think you will put this learning experience into practice in the future? For public engagement/outreach awards how with the materials/knowledge generated by this activity be used in the future?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| Attendance at this meeting allowed me build relationships with patients and patient advocates. It is my hope that this will allow longstanding communication between myself and these individuals so that they may guide and shape my research by what they require to live a long and healthy life. I also hope to be more involved with patient and public involvement here in the UK, therefore this experience has helped me to understand how to approach such a sensitive environment and how to manage expectations of everyone in attendance.  During this congress I was also able to converse with other researchers and clinicians in the field allowing me to develop project ideas alongside them which I intend to further investigate in my remaining time as a postdoctoral research fellow in the Parson lab group. These conversations will develop into both national and international collaborations that will allow generation of strong data, using advanced techniques for downstream publication in high impact journals.  Due to the incredible feedback, I received on my presentation, I will certainly better value my research data, output and contribution to the field. This experience has definitely improved my self-confidence as a researcher and has spurred me on to the next chapter of my research in vascular dysregulation in SMA. | | | | |
| Data Protection/GDPR: I consent to the data included in this submission being collected, processed and stored by the Anatomical Society. Answer YES or NO in the Box below | | | | |
| YES | | | | |
| Graphical Images: If you include graphical images you must obtain consent from people appearing in any photos and confirm that you have consent. A consent statement from you must accompany each report if relevant. A short narrative should accompany the image. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below | | | | |
| YES | | | | |
| Copyright: If you submit images you must either own the copyright to the image or have gained the explicit permission of the copyright holder for the image to be submitted as part of the report for upload to the Society’s website, Newsletter, social media and so forth. A copyright statement must accompany each report if relevant. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below | | | | |
| N/A | | | | |
| SIGNATURE | H. Allardyce | | DATE | 18.03.24 |

*If submitted electronically, a type-written name is acceptable in place of a hand-written signature*

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